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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the controversy over including hunting as a part of outdoor education. Historically, figures such as Julian Smith, of the Outdoor Education Project of the 1950's, advocated hunting as a critical element of educating children and youth about care and protection of natural resources. Henry David Thoreau saw hunting experiences as a means of becoming acquainted with nature. As with any human activity, hunting is engaged in by individuals with varying degrees of interest, competence, and responsibility. Because there are between 16 and 18 million licensed hunters in the United States, there is an implied obligation for outdoor educators to work toward educating hunters to live up to the highest standards of ethical behavior. Animal rights activists and anti-hunting groups have disseminated teaching materials to schools which emphasize simplistic and moralistic approaches in dealing with complex ecological, biological, social, and economic issues. Research has found a definite relationship between hunting and rural tradition and identified three types of hunters based on motivations for hunting and attitudes toward wildlife: meat hunters, sports hunters, and nature hunters. Nature hunters primarily hunt to be outdoors in the natural environment, and have a strong concern about and affection for the environment. All types of hunters scored higher than those who oppose hunting in factual understanding of animals. Decker found that hunters mature in their goal orientation from achievement and affiliative toward appreciative orientations. This paper contains 32 references. (KS)

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Hunting and Outdoor Education

By Bruce E. Matthews

ed. note: The Coalition has a record of publishing controversial viewpoints, and believes that encouraging the free exchange of views on issues relevant to outdoor and environmental educators is healthy for our field. The Coalition, as an organization, takes no position on these issues. The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author. Readers are encouraged to share their feelings on this and other issues by writing to the Coalition.

> *"There can be no doubt that the practice of hunting has recently engendered much bitter debate."*

Does hunting have a role in outdoor education? Is education for the consumptive recreational uses of wildlife (hunting, fishing, trapping) justifiable from a practical, ethical or philosophical standpoint? Should the teaching of how to be good environmental stewards include a rational consideration of hunting?

There can be no doubt that the practice of hunting has recently engendered much bitter debate. Few controversies are as values-laden and divisive for those who love the outdoors. The acerbic comment and vitriolic exchange on this issue has sent emotions to stratospheric heights among hunters and opponents alike. But it has done little to focus attention where it could do the most good— the enhancement, protection and preservation of wildlife habitat. Voices calling for finding this common ground are few. The debate has all the earmarks of irreversibly polarizing those who would advocate most for the natural world.

With the popularizing of environmental education and the associated blurring of the lines between environmental education and environmental advocacy (Matthews 1990), hunting's place in outdoor education has become controversial, to put it mildly. How should the issue of hunting be addressed, if indeed it should be considered at all?

The following letter was received at the Coalition headquarters not long ago. The writer, who signed herself "In Outrage" as an "outdoor education program specialist," was apparently reacting to a recent issue of the Coalition for Education in the Outdoors *Newsletter* that contained resource information in it with relevance to hunter safety and hunter educators: "I am disgusted to see your organization supporting and condoning such horrific practices as 'trophy' and 'big game' hunting. There is no place for activities such as this (sic) in education.....You can, in no way, consider yourselves 'educators.' It is obscene that you encourage and support the destruction of our natural world and wildlife in a newsletter erroneously referred to as 'environmental'."

Ouch! And the Coalition thought it was providing an unbiased forum whereby outdoor educators could network, sharing resources and airing views! The Coalition for Education in the Outdoors takes no advocacy position on these or any other issues beyond supporting outdoor education as a relevant and effective method of learning and teaching. But the fact that a brief paragraph announcing

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the availability of a video on how to plan a hunting trip could trigger such a hate-filled, hyperbolic response on the part of at least one reader is indicative of the problem.

It is not the purpose of this article to attempt to resolve the debate between hunters and those who oppose them. I do intend, as an individual outdoor educator and not representing the Coalition, to suggest that outdoor educators might want to take a second look at hunting and other consumptive uses of wildlife from an educational perspective. There are a number of values which are not being considered by those who issue blanket condemnations. Hunting, in the best sense of the activity, may offer a number of possibilities to outdoor educators willing to consider all its values with an open mind. And outdoor educators can play a crucial role in developing hunters, in the highest and most ethical sense of the word, with those individuals inclined to participate.

Hunting has been a part of education since well before anyone ever thought to call it outdoor education. Julian Smith's Outdoor Education Project in the 1950's, with its emphasis on shooting sports and hunter safety, was only popularizing what had always been part of a young man's and often a young woman's education, at least until families began to leave the land and lose contact with rural tradition.

For example: "...when some of my friends have asked me anxiously about their boys, whether they should let them hunt, I have answered, yes -- remembering that it was one of the best parts of my education -- *make* them hunters, though sportsmen only at first.... Such is oftenest the young man's introduction to the forest, and the most original part of himself....." Henry David Thoreau, a name not unfamiliar to most outdoor and environmental educators, continues on hunting: "Perhaps I have owed to (fishing) and to hunting, when quite young, my closest acquaintance with Nature. They early introduce us to and detain us in scenery with which otherwise, at that age, we should have little acquaintance. Fishermen, hunters, woodchoppers, and others, spending their lives in the fields and woods, in a peculiar sense a part of Nature themselves, are often in a more favorable mood for observing her.... She is not afraid to exhibit herself to them." (Thoreau 1854, pp.210-213)

To be fair to the context from which these passages were taken it must be stated that Thoreau, ever the existentialist, sees mankind passing beyond hunting. "He goes thither at first as a hunter and fisher, until at last, ... (he) leaves the gun and fish-pole behind. ....Thus, even in civilized communities, the embryo man passes through the hunter stage of development." Thoreau's own ambivalence, however, is apparent as he argues with himself on this and related issues. (Thoreau 1854, pp. 212-222) Interestingly, Thoreau's observation that a progression/transition exists with hunting is supported by research evidence from modern social scientists, which will be discussed later.

". . . when some of my friends have asked me anxiously about their boys, whether they should let them hunt, I have answered, yes . . ."

-- H.D. Thoreau

Dr. Julian Smith, who with L.B. Sharp are recognized as two of the most influential figures in the development of outdoor education, saw hunting and the shooting sports as a critical element of educating for the outdoors. (Carlson in Hammerman 1980) "Shooting and hunting, casting and angling....in addition to their potential for adventure, fun, and relaxation, are related to natural resources and are important for a better understanding and use of the outdoors. They are wholesome and desirable activities for children, youth and adults. ....There are also those who decry sport that involves the killing of game or fish and want to substitute only the appreciation arts. Both kinds of interests in the outdoors are necessary and important, and with education there will be the necessary balance in all activities. It is important to interest people in a wide variety of activities that will teach care and protection of natural resources and bring man and his physical environment into harmony. " (Smith et al 1972, pp. 146-147) Julian Smith summarizes by asking rhetorically, "Who, other than the outdoorsman who loves the outdoors, finds recreation and adventure in it, and thus has a stake in the natural resources that have bettered his life, will fight to restore our outdoor heritage?" (Smith et al 1972, p. 169)

One can certainly cite more recent evidence of unilateral environmental support coming from all segments of the public, and not just Smith's outdoorsperson. This in no way, however, dilutes the impressive track record of sportsmen and women in supporting conservation initiatives both with political clout and with their wallets—a record that has continued for more than 50 years.

I referred earlier to the 'highest and most ethical sense" of the meaning of hunting and being a hunter. Perhaps Barry Lopez' consideration of what it means to hunt will clarify this. Lopez, author of the highly acclaimed *Of Wolves and Men* and *Arctic Dreams*, has studied and lived extensively with hunting cultures in northern North America, and views hunting as " . . . a state of mind. All of one's faculties are brought to bear in an effort to become fully incorporated into the landscape. ....To hunt means to have the land around you like clothing. To engage in a wordless dialogue with it . . .

It means to release yourself from rational images of what something 'means' and to be concerned only that it 'is'. And then to recognize that things exist only insofar as they can be related to other things. These relationships ... become patterns. Suddenly the pattern -- which includes physical hunger, a memory of your family, and memories of the valley you are walking through, these particular plants and smells -- takes in the caribou. There is a caribou standing in front of you. The release of the arrow or bullet is like a word spoken out loud..." (Lopez 1986, p.179)

As with any human activity, hunting is engaged in by individuals with varying degrees of interest, competence and responsibility. For some hunters, or perhaps even many hunters, a significant gap exists between where they are as hunters and where they ought to be in relation to Lopez' description. Hunters have never been more aware of the critical need to educate or eliminate the less responsible and competent among themselves, in itself a tremendous opportunity for outdoor education. The degree to which the hunting community can address the problems within its own ranks may determine the degree to which hunting will survive (Reiger 1991). Clearly there is an important role for outdoor educators to play in this effort.

Certain core values, values which are extremely important to society in general, permeate the hunting tradition and are passed from one generation to the next. Some of these values, due to urbanization, mobility, fragmentation of the family and loss of a sense of community, appear to be on the decline. Outdoor educators work to support these values, most significantly through residential outdoor education programs. Values such as respect, responsibility, ethical behavior, companionship, stewardship, reverence for life and the land, obeying the law, obligation to the community, family and friends... all are important values in the hunting tradition as well, and are deeply felt. If participating in hunting offers an opportunity to learn and reinforce these values, should we be so quick to condemn it? Hunting can be a way to reaffirm their importance, perhaps for those who may not be reached in any other way.

This is not to say that all hunters act in accordance with these values. Law-breaking, irresponsibilty and excesses do occur, in hunting as well as any other activity. The nature of hunting and hunters is such that it is easy to lampoon, a fact not lost on the media. But the excessive violence and whack 'em and stack 'em mentality deplorably exemplified by a personality such as rocker Ted Nugent, when compared with the deep experience of sharing a chill-blue dawn on a deer stand among family and friends is, as Dallas newspaper writer Ray Sasser says, like comparing pornography with love.

There are between 16 and 18 million licensed hunters in the U.S., a number which, depending on the source, is either slightly declining or holding its own (USFWS 1988). This is not an insignificant number, as some anti-hunting groups would have the public believe. Hunters use the outdoors. C outdoor educators afford to ignore the opportunity to educate this group of outdoor users? Is there an implied obligation, because of traditional and modern interests in hunting, for outdoor educators to work toward educating hunters to live up to the highest standards of ethical behavior? And given the interest that hunters have in the outdoors, does it make sense to alienate this large number of outdoor enthusiasts when they could be allies in so many areas of mutual concern?

"Many thoughtful outdoor and environmental educators are finding themselves being challenged to decide whether hunting has a place, from an education perspective, in their programs."

The choice confronting outdoor educators is clear. Do we work with hunters and hunter education programs in an effort to move hunters in a more ethical direction? Or do we alienate 17 million outdoor enthusiasts because some among us personally do not agree with hunting?

Are hunting and outdoor education at cross purposes? Many thoughtful outdoor and environmental educators are finding themselves being challenged to decide whether hunting has a place, from an educational perspective, in their programs. On the one hand, animal rights activists and anti-hunting groups have developed teaching resources and curriculum guides that promote their viewpoint, and are busy disseminating this information to schools and youth groups. Often this material reaches ill-informed teachers and youth leaders who are quick to pick up on the simplistic and moralistic approaches used in dealing with extremely complex ecological, biological, social and even economic issues.

On the other hand, sportsmen's groups are slowly adopting the same tactic, pressuring educators to present pro-hunting perspectives. While the ecological and biological justifications for hunting may be able to be effectively presented, it is extremely difficult to deal with the complex social and emotional issues in a way that children can understand them. Hunters who try to explain why it is that they love something so much and yet have a desire to kill it have some idea of this difficulty.

Many teachers are not prepared to deal with this issue, do not fully understand it themselves, and may find it convenient to stick with the anthropomorphic view of wildlife that most children have. Unfortunately the lack of reality in this approach distorts the students' perceptions of the natural

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world, and like the Santa Claus myth, makes the truth more difficult to accept. Unlike with Santa Claus, however, many children grow up without ever finding out that the world of Bambi and Grizzly Adams is pure fantasy.

Because outdoor and environmental educators should have an understanding of these issues, they are often turned to for advice, and sometimes find themselves caught squarely in the middle of an emotional minefield. Professional ethics dictate that educators get the facts, present all sides of an issue and empower the learners to decide for themselves what is most right. It may help, therefore, to examine the practice of hunting from the perspective of its value to individual participants, and its potential as a means of reaching the environmental awareness, appreciation and stewardship goals of outdoor and environmental education.

Studies do show the value of an accurate view of wildlife in helping children to connect to the real world, and that these connections can lead to a predisposition toward environmentalism. (Hair and Pomerantz 1987) Schoenfeld (1978) stated "Wildlife is a key element of environmental education, a *valuable point of entry* (my italics), a rich source of illustration, a stimulus to action and an aspect of the ultimate reason for environmentalism." (p. 472) Holmes Rolston III, one of the foremost thinkers in environmental ethics today, writes, "Wild lives give what our too readily mobile, rootless culture especially needs, an attachment to landscape, locale, habitat, place." (Rolston III 1987, p.195)

As Thoreau noted, hunting connects humankind with the wild in a way and with an intensity unduplicated by any other human activity. Aldo Leopold, himself an avid hunter, asserted "There is value in any experience that reminds us of our dependency on the soil-plant-animal-man food chain, and of the fundamental organization of the biota. Civilization has so cluttered this elemental man-earth relation with gadgets and middlemen that awareness of it is growing dim. " (Leopold 1969, p. 212)

Hunting literature is rich with a consideration of the philosophical implications of participating in the so-called 'blood sports'. In considering the value of hunting to the participant this philosophical approach cannot be overlooked. It may, however, be more appropriate to look at the research done by social scientists. From the studies that have been done a pattern begins to emerge about hunting and its value to the participant.

Many researchers note that the increased urbanization that has occurred in the latter part of this century has resulted in a loss of connection with the land, and with the rural traditions associated with living close to the land. (Boggess and Henderson 1981) The growth in opposition to hunting may be related to this lack of connection (Leonard 1972; Shaw 1974; Applegate 1975) Not coincidentally, the growth in the magnitude of our environmental problems has also occurred during this time. From the research examined there appears to be a definite relationship between a connection with rural traditions at some point in life and a predisposition to hunting. (Hendee and Potter 1976; Shaw 1977; Shaw 1978; Applegate 1975; Kellert 1980) By the same token disapproval of hunting is much more likely to occur among city-dwellers and those with non-rural backgrounds. (Shaw 1977; Shaw 1978)

Research also consistently supports that the majority of Americans do not oppose hunting, if it is done humanely. (Ahlstrand 1990; Shaw 1978; Reiger 1978; Shaw and Gilbert 1974; Boggess and Henderson 1981) It appears that the greater problem lies with opposition to hunters, based on a negative impression of their competence and behavior. (Shaw and Gilbert 1974; Reiger 1978; Boggess 1977). Again, this suggests an important role that outdoor educators can play in educating hunters in appropriate outdoor skills and in ethical behavior.

An important contributor to our understanding of people's attitudes toward animals has been Dr. Stephen Kellert of Yale University. Through his extensive surveys of American's attitudes toward all kinds of animals and activity involving animals, Kellert was able to develop a typology of attitudes to characterize people's perceptions of animals and animal activities. His findings about hunters are interesting.

Kellert (1976) categorized hunters into three types based on their motivations for hunting and their attitudes toward wildlife. He identified these as meat hunters, sport hunters and nature hunters. Nature hunters, those that hunted primarily to be outdoors in the natural environment, showed a great deal of interest in wildlife,

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getting out into the natural world, seeing wild areas left unspoiled and unexploited. Nature hunters showed a strong concern about and affection for the natural environment, and scored higher than any other group in their knowledge about animals. Applegate and Otto (1982) had similar findings, and theorized that hunters passed through a progression of experiences culminating in becoming nature hunters.

All types of hunters, and particularly the nature hunter, scored significantly higher than anti-hunters in the factual understanding of animals in Kellert's studies. In fact, the highest scores Kellert obtained in this category were members of the National Trappers Association (68.3), bird watchers (66) and nature hunters (65.3). Anti-hunters scored 53.9 and the general public score was 52.9. Both trappers and nature hunters scored at the top of Kellert's attitude categories in the naturalistic (interest in and affecton for wildlife and the outdoors), and ecologistic (concern for the environment as a system and for the interrelationships of wildlife and its habitat) areas. (Kellert 1978; 1980; 1981; 1987)

Researchers have looked hard at why people participate in hunting. Based on previous studies plus in-depth interviews, Cornell researcher Dr. Dan Decker et al (1984) developed three categories of goal orientation that describe hunter motivations for participation. Briefly, these may be defined as follows:

Affiliative: where the motivation is primarily to accompany another person or group; to enjoy their company and enhance their relationship both during the activity as well as in planning it and telling stories about it afterwards.

Achievement: where the motivation is primarily to meet a specific performance goal, such as harvesting a deer for meat, acquiring a trophy, spotting certain wildlife, etc.

Appreciative: where the primary motivation is to seek a sense of peace, belonging, and familiarity with nature, with the resultant stress reduction associated with the activity. The simple recollection of the experience can be rewarding in itself. (Decker et al 1987) This is not unlike Kellert's description of a nature hunter.

Decker found that hunters tended to shift or mature in their goal orientations, albeit at different rates, from achievement and affiliative toward appreciative orientations. (Decker et al 1987) These findings suggest that something happens as a result of participation in hunting that tends to develop a deeper connection with the natural world; and perhaps a need to reaffirm that connection through the hunting activity.

Kellert's studies have some other implications for outdoor educators, particularly in light of the discussion of hunters. Dr. Kellert states that the American public is extremely limited in its knowledge about animals, and "is typically narrow in its emotional and intellectual focus and largely directed at a small segment of the animal community...We have all too often witnessed the unfortunate consequences of undue public affection or aesthetic attraction for particular species that can result in inordinate concern for baby seals or mute swans but little sympathy for the possible extinction of a Tecopa pupfish or Dismal Swamp shrew..... This process of concern, however, must move beyond feelings of compassion and kindness for selected animals to a conviction that the health and well-being of wildlife and natural habitats are ultimately linked to human well-being and even survival." Kellert 1987, p. 223 and 227) That's quite a charge for outdoor and environmental educators! And I would submit that it is one more likely to be accomplished by recognizing the legitimacy and value of participating in hunting, as a means of accomplishing stewardship objectives.

Hunting belongs in outdoor education, just like outdoor education belongs in hunting. To the extent that hunting in its best and most ethical sense shares and supports the goals of outdoor education, it should be given consideration by all professional outdoor educators, regardless of personal feelings or participation. The shared commitment to the wildlife resource and habitat offers unparalleled opportunities for hunters as well as non-hunters to cooperate in support of wildlife habitat preservation and enhancement. To the extent that hunter knowledge, skills, attitudes and behavior fail to reach the highest expectations, an imperative exists for hunters and an opportunity exists for outdoor educators to make the needed changes.

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